The impact of domestic food waste on climate change

**It is estimated that food wasted by the US and Europe could feed the world three times over. Food waste contributes to excess consumption of freshwater and fossil fuels which, along with methane and CO2 emissions from decomposing food, impacts global climate change. Every tonne of food waste prevented has the potential to save 4.2 tonnes of CO2 equivalent. If we all stop wasting food that could have been eaten, the CO2 impact would be the equivalent of taking one in four cars off the road.**

In the US, a report in Plos One at the end of last year found that per capita food waste has progressively increased by 50 percent since 1974 reaching more than 1400 calories per person per day or 150 trillion calories per year. Food waste now accounts for more than one quarter of the total freshwater consumption and 300 million barrels of oil per year.

The study funded by the National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases - The Progressive Increase of Food Waste in America and Its Environmental Impact, found that 40 percent of all the [food produced](http://www.nextgenerationfood.com/) in the US is thrown out.

According to the CDC, Americans consume about 2600 calories a day on average. Based on that estimate, 1400 calories is roughly a meal and a half of food wasted every day (or a Big Mac meal with a large Coke).

The amount of food waste generated in the US is huge. It is the third largest waste stream after paper and yard waste. In 2008, about 12.7 percent of the total municipal solid waste (MSW) generated in America was food scraps. Less than three percent of that 32 million tonnes was recovered and recycled. The rest - 31 million tonnes - was thrown away into landfills or incinerators, according to the [Environmental Protection Agency](http://www.epa.gov/osw/conserve/materials/organics/food/fd-basic.htm).

Over in the UK, things don't fair much better. Each year, 8.3 million tonnes of food is thrown away by households in the UK. This equates to a mountain of leftovers, enough to fill 4700 Olympic-sized swimming pools, says the government's anti-waste arm, [Wrap](http://www.wrap.org.uk/). Of this food, 5.3 million tonnes could have been eaten.

Reducing food waste is a major issue and not just about good food going to waste; wasting food costs the average family with children GBP£680 a year and has serious environmental implications too.

**Survey on food**  
  
A new survey in the UK by the business intelligence company, Retail Active has found that fruit, salad and vegetables are the most wasted items in the weekly shopping basket, with bananas being the most wasted item, closely followed by fresh milk.

The data found that people who live cities generally waste the most food but the worst culprits are city-dwelling single men, aged between 25 and 35, who waste food worth an average of GBP£17.43 a month.

Retail Active, says the South East of England has the highest food waste tally, second is the North West and the area with the least wastage is Scotland.

It says a family of four throws away an average of GBP£15.70 worth of food every month but people aged over 57 are the least wasteful, throwing away an average of just GBP£3.36 per month, the British paper [The Telegraph](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/foodanddrink/7344752/Banana-is-most-wasted-food.html) reports.  
  
Also high on the wastage list was fresh meat and uneaten prepared food. Tinned food is the least wasted.

Retail Actives used a representative sample of 2000 people, to find nearly three quarters of the responders said they believed their food waste had little or no consequence for the environment. Forty percent actually think food waste is good for the economy because it keeps production moving. Seventy seven percent said they do not consider the impact on the global environment when buying food.

The main reasons for food waste were identified as poor planning, busy lifestyles, bad habits, laziness and too large portion sizes for both ready to eat and prepared food.

Only six percent of the purchasers polled checked sell-by dates but of those that did, the vast majority, 92 percent, chose food from the rear of the shelf to get maximum food freshness.

Food wastage is an issue all around the world, not just in the US and the UK.